Wireless Server Management

Use a wireless device to administer your network

The negative impact that downtime can have on a company has never been more apparent. Companies that don't have an around-the-clock staff of experts must rely on some type of paging scheme to inform an administrator when a problem arises. The administrator then has to gain access to the appropriate system to troubleshoot and resolve the problem. Several vendors are trying to make life easier for over-burdened administrators by offering wireless management solutions that feature problem-notification, troubleshooting, and problem-resolution capabilities from a wireless handheld device.

This Buyer's Guide lists products that support an array of devices as well as products that support only one or two device types. If you plan to leverage an investment you've already made in wireless handheld devices, make sure that the product you choose supports the device you have and that the vendor is committed to maintaining support for that device in the future.

The listed vendors have taken several different approaches to enable interactive capabilities in their products. The most prevalent approach is the Wireless Application Protocol (WAP) browser interface. The WAP standard lets an administrative tool communicate with devices such as cell phones and handheld computers from different manufacturers. (For details about the WAP standard, see Tao

Zhou, "Going Wireless," March 15, 2001.) The Go.Web service from GoAmerica Communications lets Research In Motion (RIM) handheld device owners enjoy the same type of browser-based functionality that the WAP interface provides. Opalis Software's email add-on product for OpalisRobot takes the unique approach of letting you email action request messages from your wireless device to Opalis-Robot, which then carries out the requested management tasks.

When you're evaluating products to purchase, think about the specific tasks you need to be able to perform. Simply having a good connection and a nice interface isn't enough and will do little to console you when you have to drive to your workplace in the middle of the night to solve a problem. When you start surveying the capabilities of different products, you can easily become overenthusiastic about the possibilities.

Before you make a purchase decision, list the functions that the product you choose must be able to perform. Features I consider

mandatory include the ability to shut down and restart servers, start and stop applications and services, and execute commands. Other features that increase the effectiveness of these products include print server management, user management, configurable thresholds and alerts, network troubleshooting utilities (e.g., Ping, Tracert), and file-system access. If you want to be

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able to audit administrative tasks performed from wireless devices, look for a product that performs the logging necessary to provide an audit trail.

Given the range of devices, features, and pricing, you might have difficulty figuring out the Return on Investment (ROI) for different solutions. Start by listing the types of problems that have historically caused you to take administrative action in your environment, then examine whether you could have resolved those problems more quickly and efficiently by using the wireless management tools you're evaluating. Finally, look at the frequency with which you and others in your support staff can expect to use the tool's remote capabilities, then determine what that tool is worth to you and your organization.

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Company/Information	Product Name	Price	Description
Advanced Systems Concepts http://www.activebatch.com	ActiveBatch Wireless	Starts at $595	Provides remote access for job scheduling, initiation, and management; receives and presents a message so that you can take appropriate action by direct reply from any location; return-receipt acknowledges that the operation was received and processed
Covatron 818-591-7318 888-408-7318 http://www.covatron.com	WirelessAdmin 1.5	$295	Enables your Palm Pilot, Windows CE device, or WAP-enabled cell phone to manage Windows 2000, Windows NT, Windows Me, and Windows 9x systems; lets you start and stop applications and services, run custom scripts, and shut down and reboot machines from your wireless device
GreenRamp Software 303-412-8900 877-536-4700 http://www.greenramp.com	O²Server	Starts at $.50 per day	Software that works with any Web-enabled cell phone or Personal Digital Assistant (PDA); features instant error notification, snapshots of network servers, and system-performance monitoring; lets you administer remote servers; available for NT, Linux, and Sun Microsystems Sun Solaris systems
Opalis Software 416-253-9300 888-672-5471 http://www.opalis.com	OpalisRobot	Starts at $999 per license	Monitoring and automation software that lets you administer networks through a wireless handheld device; provides realtime monitoring, notification, corrective action, and event-driven job scheduling to administer Win2K and NT environments; monitors system resources and automates network administrative tasks
StarRemote http://www.starremote.com	StarAdmin	$2495	Network-management software that works with wireless PDAs, WAP-enabled workstations, and two-way pagers to manage Windows events, drive shares, printers, services; lets you restart computers, launch scripts, and do DNS lookups, execute tracert commands, and manage routers and switches
ThinkersGroup.com 631-592-1360 http://www.thinkersgroup.com	ThinkITAdmin	$299 per server	Lets you execute remote administrator activities, and administer systems from any Internet-compatible wireless device; provides full command-line access